

### Physical abuse

Out of the 4 categories of abuse and which are; neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse....physical abuse is the third most common initial category of abuse for children who are likely to be supported by children services, statutory interventions and engagement.

#### Definition of physical abuse

Physical abuse is deliberately physically hurting a child. It might take a variety of different forms, including hitting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.

Physical abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health or if they live in a home where domestic abuse happens.

Babies and disabled children also have a higher risk of suffering physical abuse. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. Physical abuse can also occur outside of the family environment.

*'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused – advice for practitioners' HM Government (2015)*

Babies and children who are immobile and therefore unable to communicate their abuse with others are extremely vulnerable. The extent of reported abuse known for children under the age of one year is extremely high. Analysis of serious (significant) case reviews where children have received serious injury or who have died as a result of injury, shows that the prevalence of the 'toxic trio' risk factors have played a significant part in physical abuse. The 'toxic trio' refer to;

- substance abuse (including alcohol and drugs)
- poor parental mental ill health
- domestic abuse / violence

### What might physical abuse look like for children in the early years?

- Bruising, open wounds or injuries
- Bruised or pinched areas such as the ears
- Any bruising to a non-mobile baby, toddler or a child who is disabled or ill and is immobile which should be viewed as suspicious given the age and circumstances of the child
- Broken blood vessels in the eyes suggesting shaking or trauma to the head (particularly babies)
- Bruising in or around the mouth, particularly in small babies which may indicate force feeding
- Slap marks - imprints of a hand
- Bruising on the arms, buttocks and thighs (may be an indicator of sexual abuse)
- Bite mark which can leave clear impressions of the teeth
- Circular burns from cigarettes
- Burns including marks from objects used to cause the burn or red, blistered areas suggesting scalding such as immersing a child into very hot water such as a bath

### Concerns may be raised if parents or carers;

- Give explanations for an injury that is inconsistent with the injury
- Give several different explanations provided for an injury
- Cannot explain why there was a delay in seeking treatment for the child
- Are unable to explain or avoid addressing a repeated presentation of minor injuries
- Use of different doctors and A&E departments